

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

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INFO AMEMBASSY DAR ES SALAAM
AMEMBASSY LUSAKA
AMEMBASSY MAPUTO
AMEMBASSY NAIROBI
AMEMBASSY PRETORIA

C O N F I D E N T I A L LILONGWE 0901

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PGOV, PINT, MI
SUBJECT: MALAWI PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

REF: LILONGWE 733 (NOTAL)

SUMMARY: PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS CHANGED TO JUNE 29
AT WHICH TIME 146 CANDIDATES WILL CONTEST 79 CON-
STITUENCIES (8 OTHERS WILL BE CONTESTED LATER). OF ALL
CANDIDATES NOMINATED, 30 PERCENT WERE DISQUALIFIED AS BEING
INADEQUATE IN ENGLISH. ALL PRESENT MINISTERS EXCEPT
ONE WERE NOMINATED BUT 26 MPS IN THE MOST RECENT
PARLIAMENT WERE NOT. ELECTION HAS AROUSED MODEST
AMOUNT OF INTEREST, PERHAPS BECAUSE IT IS NEW
PHENOMENON, BUT IT IS UNLIKELY THAT THIS ELECTION
WILL CHANGE RUBBER-STAMP NATURE OF PARLIAMENT. IT
MAY, ON OTHER HAND, IMPROVE QUALITY OF MPS. END SUMMARY.

2. MALAWI'S PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS WILL BE HELD
JUNE 29, INSTEAD OF JUNE 26 AND 27 AS ORIGINALLY
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SCHEDULED. PRESIDENT BANDA PRESIDED OVER A LARGE
RALLY IN BLANTYRE JUNE 4 AT WHICH TIME HE PRESENTED
CERTIFICATES TO THE 146 CANDIDATES WHO WERE NOMINATED
AND SUBSEQUENTLY QUALIFIED TO STAND FOR THE ELECTION.

3. THIS BEING THE FIRST ELECTION BY UNIVERSAL SUFFRAGE
SINCE 1961, I.E. SINCE MALAWI'S INDEPENDENCE, THERE

APPEARS TO BE MORE THAN THE USUAL AMOUNT OF INTEREST. HERETOFORE, MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT WERE ELECTED THROUGH THE PARTY APPARATUS WITH LOCAL PARTY OFFICIALS SELECTING THREE TO FIVE CANDIDATES AND PRESIDENT BANDA DESIGNATING THE WINNER. THIS TIME, LOCAL PARTY OFFICIALS HAVE AGAIN NOMINATED THREE TO FIVE CANDIDATES FOR EACH CONSTITUENCY AND, ALTHOUGH PRESIDENT BANDA EXERCISED HIS PREROGATIVE OF ELIMINATING CANDIDATES HE FELT WERE UNQUALIFIED, IN MANY OF THE CONSTITUENCIES THERE WILL ACTUALLY BE CONTEST BY TWO OR MORE CANDIDATES AND THE FINAL SELECTION WILL BE LEFT TO THE VOTERS IN THOSE CONSTITUENCIES ON JUNE 29. OF THE ORIGINAL NOMINEES, WE ARE INFORMED BY PARTY SECRETARY GENERAL MULUZI THAT 30 PERCENT WERE DISQUALIFIED BECAUSE OF LACK OF SUFFICIENT ABILITY IN ENGLISH. (THE UNIVERSITY VICE CHANCELOR WAS IN CHARGE OF ENGLISH EXAMS FOR THE CANDIDATES WHICH WERE GIVEN BY UNIVERSITY AND SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS THROUGHOUT MALAWI ON MAY 22, SOME OF THE EXAMINERS BEING AID-FINANCED PROFESSORS AT BUNDA COLLEGE.) A CERTAIN NUMBER WERE PRESUMABLY ALSO DISQUALIFIED FOR HAVING PREVIOUSLY BEEN DETAINED, IMPRISONED FOR THEFT OR OTHER CRIMINAL OFFENSES, EXPELLED OR SUSPENDED FROM THE PARTY, OR CONSIDERED TO BE NOT OF SOUND MIND, AS STIPULATED IN THE CONSTITUTION, OR FOR HAVING BEEN EXPELLED OR SUSPENDED FROM THE PARTY, AS STIPULATED

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IN THE "GUIDE FOR THE SELECTION OF CANDIDATES" (COPY POUCHED TO AF/E). SOME PRESUMABLY WERE ALSO ELIMINATED BY PRESIDENT BANDA BUT WE DO NOT KNOW HOW MANY.

4. SINCE ALL 87 CONSTITUENCIES WERE TO NOMINATE AT LEAST THREE CANDIDATES, THERE SHOULD HAVE BEEN AT LEAST 261 TO BEGIN WITH. THE SLATE IN ONE CONSTITUENCY WAS RULED TO BE INELIGIBLE EARLY IN THE NOMINATING PROCESS FOR ILLEGAL CAMPAIGNING PRIOR TO THE FORMAL NOMINATIONS. THAT CONSTITUENCY IS AMONG THE EIGHT THAT WILL NOT BE CONTESTED IN THIS ELECTION; PRESUMABLY CANDIDATES IN THE OTHER SEVEN WERE DISQUALIFIED OR ELIMINATED AS DESCRIBED ABOVE. (A BY-ELECTION WILL TAKE PLACE SUBSEQUENTLY.) IN 30 CONSTITUENCIES THERE WAS ONLY ONE QUALIFIED CANDIDATE, EACH OF WHOM HAS ALREADY BEEN DECLARED THE WINNER. THERE ARE TWO CANDIDATES IN 31 OTHER CONSTITUENCIES AND AT LEAST THREE IN THE REMAINING 18 CONSTITUENCIES.

5. ALL PRESENT MINISTERS WITH ONE EXCEPTION (MINISTER OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT KAPICHIRA BANDA) WERE NOMINATED, ONLY FOUR OF WHOM ARE UNOPPOSED. ACCORDING TO THE

CONSTITUTION, THE PRESIDENT MAY APPOINT MINISTERS FROM OUTSIDE PARLIAMENT WHO WOULD THEN ALSO BECOME MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT OVER AND ABOVE THE 87 REPRESENTATING SPECIFIC CONSTITUENCIES. IN ADDITION, THE PRESIDENT MAY APPOINT UP TO 15 OTHER MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT WHO WOULD NOT REPRESENT SPECIFIC CONSTITUENCIES.

6. FOUR EX-MINISTERS OR EX-PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARIES ARE AMONG THE CANDIDATES WHO WILL BE RUNNING: KELVIN N. BANDA, PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY OF MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, 1972-75; MRS. A. NTHOLO, PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY OF MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE, 1974-76; ARTHUR A. CHATSIKA PHIRI, MINISTER OF HEALTH, 1976-77; P.L. MAKHUMULA NKHOMA, MINISTER OF HEALTH, 1972-75
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AND REGIONAL MINISTER FOR THE SOUTH, 1975-77. OF THE MPS IN THE MOST RECENT PARLIAMENT, 26 WERE NOT RENOMINATED. SOME CIVIL SERVANTS WERE NOMINATED BUT REPORTEDLY MOST IF NOT ALL HAVE WITHDRAWN BECAUSE THE GOM ADVISED THEM THAT THEY WOULD HAVE TO RESIGN THEIR CIVIL SERVICE POSITIONS WHICH THEY COULD NOT REGAIN IF THEY LOST THE ELECTION. APPARENTLY THE GOM DID NOT WANT TO SEE TOO MANY MPS COMING FROM THE CIVIL SERVICE.

7. THERE ARE 14 WOMEN CANDIDATES (15 WOMEN SAT IN LAST PARLIAMENT). THE ENGLISH QUALIFICATION MAY HAVE IN EFFECT REDUCED THE NUMBER OF WOMEN CANDIDATES MORE THAN THE MEN.

8. COMMENT: SINCE THERE HAS BEEN NO COMPARABLE ELECTION IN MALAWI'S HISTORY, IT IS DIFFICULT TO PREDICT HOW LARGE THE VOTER TURNOUT WILL BE. THERE IS NO LEGAL REQUIREMENT TO VOTE AND, OF COURSE, IN SEVERAL CONSTITUENCIES THERE ARE EITHER NO CANDIDATES OR NO CONTEST. NONETHELESS, AND DESPITE SOME INITIAL SKEPTICISM, THERE APPEARS TO BE SOME SINCERE VOTER INTEREST BECAUSE ELECTION BY UNIVERSAL SUFFRAGE IS A NEW PHENOMENON IN MALAWI'S POLITICAL LIFE. MOREOVER, GOM EXTENDED VOTER REGISTRATION PERIOD AND HAS ENCOURAGED VOTERS IN OTHER WAYS, INCLUDING WIDESPREAD PUBLICITY, WHICH WILL PROBABLY CONVINCE LARGE MAJORITY OF VOTERS THAT THEY WILL BE OBLIGED TO CAST BALLOTS. THERE ARE NUMEROUS SAFEGUARDS IN THE ELECTORAL PROCEDURE WHICH, UNTIL PROVED OTHERWISE, SHOULD REASSURE POPULACE THAT THE ELECTION WILL BE CONDUCTED WITHOUT UNDUE INFLUENCE BY THE PARTY OR ON THE PART OF INDIVIDUAL, PRESTIGIOUS CANDIDATES.
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9. IT IS LIKELY THAT NEITHER THIS ELECTION BY UNIVERSAL SUFFRAGE NOR ENGLISH REQUIREMENT WILL CHANGE THE ROLE OF PARLIAMENT IN MALAWI'S POLITICAL PROCESS, BUT IT MAY ENHANCE THE OPPORTUNITIES FOR INDIVIDUAL MPS TO DEMONSTRATE THEIR TALENTS AND PERHAPS BE CALLED UPON BY PRESIDENT BANDA FOR FUTURE RESPONSIBILITIES. HE WILL NOT, OF COURSE, TOLERATE DEVIATION FROM THE PARTY, I.E. HIS, LINE BUT IT IS POSSIBLE THAT A BETTER BREED OF MPS THAN THE SYCOPHANTS NORMALLY ENTRENCHED IN THE PARLIAMENT MIGHT PROVIDE THE POPULACE WITH A BETTER OUTLET FOR EXPRESSION AND PRESIDENT BANDA WITH A BETTER FIX ON THE STATE OF THE COUNTRY.

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